DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 286 091 CG 020 174

AUTHOR Hippler, Hans J.; And Others
TITLE The Gender Gap in Attitudes toward Peace.
PUB DATE Jun 86
NOTE 15p.; Paper presented at the International Society of Political Psychology (Amsterdam, Netherlands, June 1986).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Disarmament; Foreign Countries; *Knowledge Level; Military Service; *Peace; *Political Attitudes; *Public Opinion; *Sex Differences; War
IDENTIFIERS *West Germany

ABSTRACT

Opinion polls in the United States have shown gender differences in attitudes toward military issues, with women reporting less support for aggressive military options than do men. The cross cultural stability of gender differences in attitudes toward military issues was examined using data from 2,145 West Germans who reported opinions about the arms race, the German peace movement, and decisions made by President Reagan. The German data replicated the gender differences found in the United States, with German women expressing more peaceful opinions than did German men. A field experiment was conducted using 63 men and 38 women to examine whether this gender difference could be due to a lower interest by women in political issues and a tendency by men to comment on political issues despite an inadequate knowledge base. The results revealed that women with a high degree of knowledge about military issues were more likely to report attitudes in favor of disarmament than were men with a comparable level of knowledge. Women with low or moderate levels of knowledge, however, did not differ from men in their views. These data provide little support for the gender gap hypothesis. What appeared to be a pronounced difference in political attitudes now seems due to a high degree of "no opinion" responses from women. Only a minority of well-informed women were found to consistently show more peaceful attitudes than their male counterparts. (Author/NB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED286091

THE GENDER GAP IN ATTITUDES TOWARD PEACE

Hans- J. Hippler
Zentrum für Umfragen, Methoden
und Analysen, Mannheim, FRG

Norbert Schwarz
and
Bettina Scheuring
Universität Heidelberg, FRG

CG 020174

Paper presented at the meetings of the International Society of Political Psychology, Amsterdam, The Netherlands, June 1986. Address correspondence to Dr. Norbert Schwarz, Psychologisches Institut, Universität Heidelberg, Hauptstr.47-51, D-6900 Heidelberg, W. Germany.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Norbert Schwarz

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)"

ABSTRACT

Opinion polls in the United States have repeatedly shown gender differences in attitudes toward military spending , military intervention and arms control. Specifically, women report less support for aggressive military options. This 'gender gap' has partly been interpreted as evidence for the emergence of a peaceful women's culture.

In the present paper we first examine the cross cultural stability of gender differences in attitudes toward military issues using opinion poll data from West Germany. Second, we explore whether the discovered 'gender gap' phenomenon is indeed due to women's greater peacefulness, or whether it is a function of women's general indifference toward these issues and/or their hesitancy to express strong political positions.

The Gender Gap in Attitudes Toward Peace

The topic of the present paper is a phenomenon that seems to be one of the most reliable and consistent findings in the area of attitudes toward peace and disarmement, namely that women seem to be more peaceful than men. Indeed, this finding has attracted a lot of public attention, primarily in the U.S., and a number of social activists have invested great hopes in this gender difference. As our presentation progresses, we will unfortunately have to point out that these hopes are to a large part unwarranted.
But let us begin with a review of the basic findings.

The gender gap hypothesis

Opinion polls in the United States repeatedly uncovered a "gender gap" in President Reagan's popularity. Specifically, women expressed less support for the President than men. This has frequently been attributed to more general gender differences in attitudes towards violence and the use of force, as well as gender differences in attending to the needs of others. Moreover, some writers have interpreted the gender gap as encouraging evidence for the emergence of a new "ethic of care" or the emergence of a peaceful women's culture (Boulding, 1984), that is characterized by "greater opposition to military spending, military intervention, and environmental exploitation, and greater support for aid to minorities and the poor" (p.1).

In the present paper, we want to focus on gender differences in attitudes toward military spending, military intervention, and arms control. Specifically, we want to explore the cross-cultural stability of differences found in the U.S. data using opinion poll data from West Germany. Moreover, we want to look more closely at the nature of the obtained gender difference to explore if it provides evidence for the emergence of a new political culture among women.

Cross-cultural stability

In a careful review of gender differences in attitudes toward violence in the United States Smith (1984, p.384) came to the conclusion that "women and men differ both in their use of violence and in their approval of violence across a wide range of social conditions including foreign affairs, social control and law enforcement, and interpersonal relations". Analyzing 285 data points he found that women were less likely than men to support "the violent or forceful option in 87 percent of the readings".

For example, American women were less likely than American men to think that the development of the atomic bomb was a good thing (Abzug, 1984, p.124) and they were less likely than men to see any justification for a U.S. nuclear first strike. Moreover, American women repeatedly reported less support for military interventions in Korea, Vietnam, El Salvador and Grenada than American men (Abzug, 1984, p.124). In all of these questions the differences between men and women were in the range of 10 to 20 percentage points.

To explore the cross-cultural stability of these gender differences we analyzed data from a nationwide study with a random sample of 2145 citizens of the Federal Republic of Germany. As part of a larger survey conducted by EMNID in the summer of 1981, respondents were asked to report their opinions about the arms race and the German peace movement, as well as their opinions about some decisions made by U.S. President Reagan.

TABLE 1 HERE

In general, the German data replicate the gender differences found in the United States, as shown in **Table 1**. Specifically, women were less likely to believe that serving in the German army contributes more to maintaining peace than supporting the anti-nukes movement. Moreover, they were less likely to support Reagan's decision to deliver weapons to China or to support his decision to back the military regime in El Salvador. Similarly, women were less opposed to the idea of initiating a reduction of the arms race by unilateral Western disarmement.

In summary, it seems that German women express more peaceful opinions than German men - much as has been reported for American women. So far, the data seem to suggest that women may be a particularly promising target group for peace activities. However, a closer scrutiny of these data raises some doubts in this regard.

A gap of indifference?

TABLE 2 HERE

Specifically, while women were less likely to support Reagans's decisions, they were also less likely to report opposition to his decisions, as is shown in **Table 2**. Similarly, while fewer women than men endorsed the statement that serving in the army would contribute more to peace than supporting the anti-nukes movement, fewer women than men also felt that this statement was wrong. And the same holds true for the remaining questions on peace and disarmement.

In general, while women are less likely to support violent options they are also less likely to oppose them.

Table 3 here

Rather, women are particularly likely to report no opinion, as is shown in Table 3, and it is this difference in "no opinion" responses that accounts for the apparent gender gap in attitudes. And this holds true for the majority of questions we reviewed in German and U.S. surveys. Accordingly, Smith (1984, p.385) noted that American women frequently favored a moderate middle alternative over either the more or the less forceful options when asked about attitudes toward military spending.

In combination, these data suggest that the "gender gap" phenomenon in attitudes toward military issues is in large parts due to women's indifference and/or their hesitancy to express strong political positions. Thus, what looks like a gender difference in attitudes toward military issues may be an expression of a more general gender difference, namely women's tendency to show higher rates of "don't know" responses in surveys (Rapoport, 1982). In the present data, this "no opinion gap" was somewhat reduced when education was controlled for, but the difference was still significant even among respondents with a high level of formal education.

What mediates gender differences in no opinion responses?

Facing these results, we wondered which factors mediate the pronounced gender difference in no opinion responses. Two plausible hypothesis deserve particular attention.

On the one hand, military issues have traditionally been predominantly male topics in which women may show little interest.

Therefore, women may know less about these topics, resulting in higher rates of no opinion. In line with this hypothesis, Reuband (1986) reported on the basis of German survey data, collected in the fall of 1983, that women knew less about the deployment of U.S. nuclear missiles in Western Europe than men.

On the other hand, men may be less likely to admit a lack of knowledge or opinion, resulting in a higher rate of substantive answers despite a lack of adequate information. In fact, a considerably higher proportion of German men than of German women reported an opinion about the German "Minister Meyers" - even though this minister was completely fictitious. Moreover, men were significantly more likely to comment on Minister Meyers's performance when the interviewer was female rather than male, suggesting that they did not want to acknowledge a lack of knowledge vis a vis a female interviewer.

In combination, these findings suggest that traditional gender roles may foster both, a lower interest of women in prototypically "male" political issues and a greater tendency in men to comment on these "male" issues despite an inadequate knowledge base.

A field experiment

To explore these hypothesis in the context of the present issue, we asked 63 men and 38 women as part of a larger mail survey (random sample of adults living in eight communities in West Germany) to rate the importance of several weapon systems for the security of the Federal Republic of Germany. Included in the list of weapon systems was a fictitious system labeled "TX".

TABLE 4 HERE

Let us first consider the no opinion responses. Regarding the existing weapon systems, 12.9 % of the male but 28.3 % of the female respondents reported no opinion, a difference of 15.4 % which is much in line with our previous findings. The rate of no opinion responses increased considerably when the question concerned the fictitious system "TX". Under this condition, 31.7 % of the men and 50 % of the women reported having no opinion . Most importantly, this increase was roughly eqivalent for male (18.8%) and female (21.7%) respondents, suggesting that the difference in no opinion responses is <u>not</u> primarily due to men's willingness to report an opinion even though they may have no idea what they are talking about. Rather, these parallel increases suggest that responses to fictitious issues are moderated by other processes, which we will not elaborate in the present paper (cf. Bishop et al., 1985; Schuman & Kalton, 1985).

In addition to assessing the rate of no opinion responses, our data allow a comparison of the attitudes of men and women who <u>did</u> report an opinion. Averaged over all weapon systems, women evaluated the development and deployment of new weapons to be less important for the defense of the Federal Republic of Germany than men with an overall mean of 2.5 for women and 1.7 for men on a seven-point-scale from 1=very important to 7=unimportant, $t(73)= 2.5$, $p<.02$.

This finding supports the hypothesis that women report more peaceful attitudes than men - if they report any attitude at all. Moreover, this finding is in line with Reuband's (1986) observation that women with a high degree of knowledge about military issues are more likely to report attitudes in favor of disarmement than men with a comparable level of knowledge. Women with a low or moderate level of knowledge, on the other hand, do not differ from men - and contrary to the gender gap hypothesis, these women constitute the majority of more than 80 %.

In summary then, our data provide little support for the popular gender gap hypothesis. What looked to some activists like a pronounced difference in political attitudes is primarily due to a

high degree of no opinion responses among women. And it is only a minority of particularly well-informed women that show consistently more peaceful attitudes than their male counterparts.

References

Abzug, B. (1984)
Gender Gap. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Bishop, G.F., Tuchfarber, A.J. & Oldendick, R.W. (1985)
Opinions on fictitious issues: The pressure to answer survey questions. Unpublished manuscript.

Boulding, E. (1984)
Focus on: The gender gap. Journal of Peace Research, 21, 1-3.

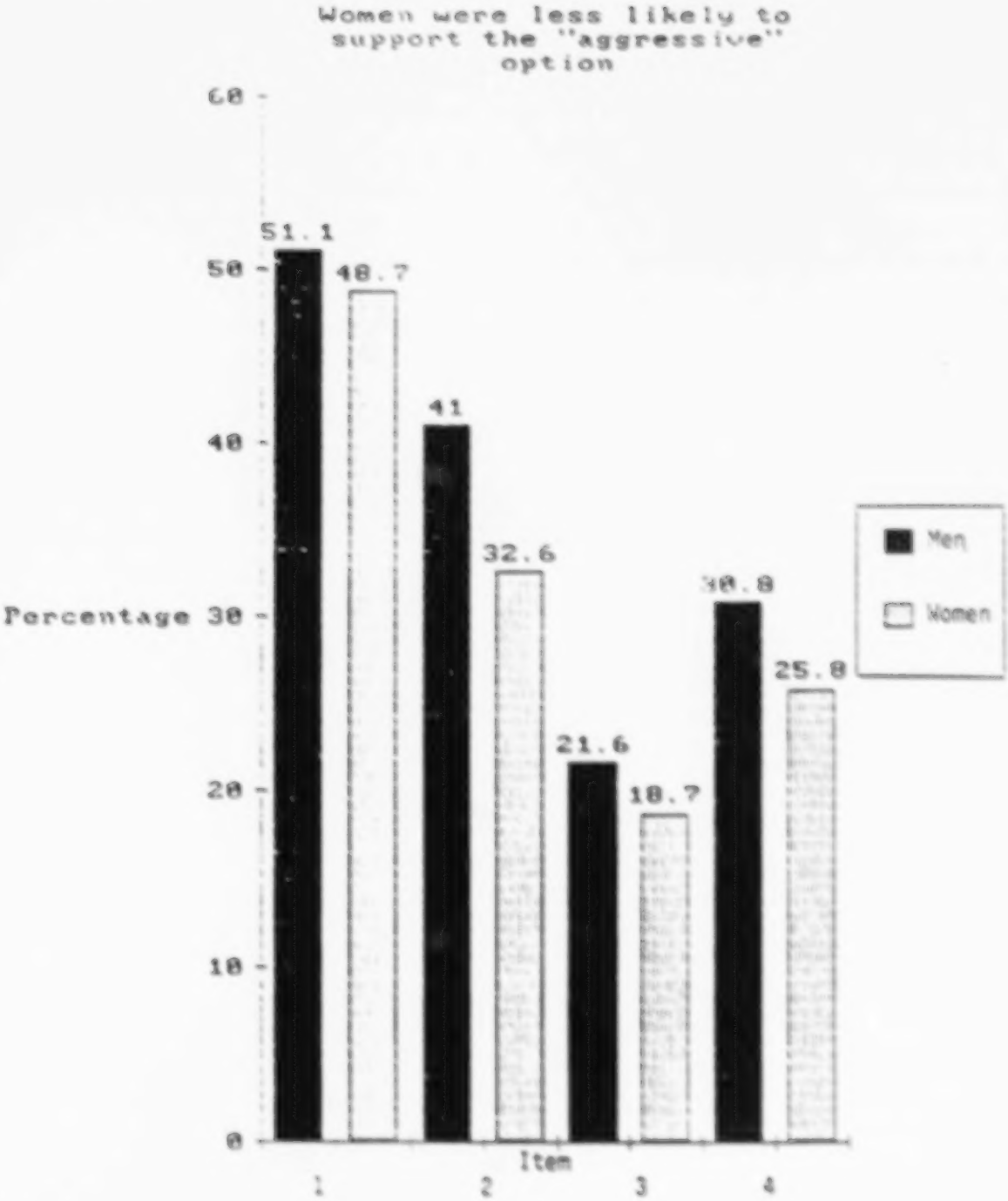
Rapoport, R.B. (1982)
Sex differences in attitude expression. Public Opinion Quarterly, 46, 86-96.

Reuband, K.H. (1986)
Struktur und Defizite sicherheitspolitischer Kenntnisse in der Bevölkerung. Zum Verhältnis von Wissen und Einstellung in der Nachrüstungsfrage. In: Steinweg, R. (Ed.), Kriegsursachen. Frankfurt/M., in press.

Schuman, H. & Kalton, G. (1985)
Survey methods. In: Lindzey, G. & Aronson, E., Handbook of Social Psychology, New York: Random House, 635-697.

Smith, T.W. (1984)
The polls: Gender and attitudes toward violence. Public Opinion Quarterly, 48, 384-396.

TABLE 1



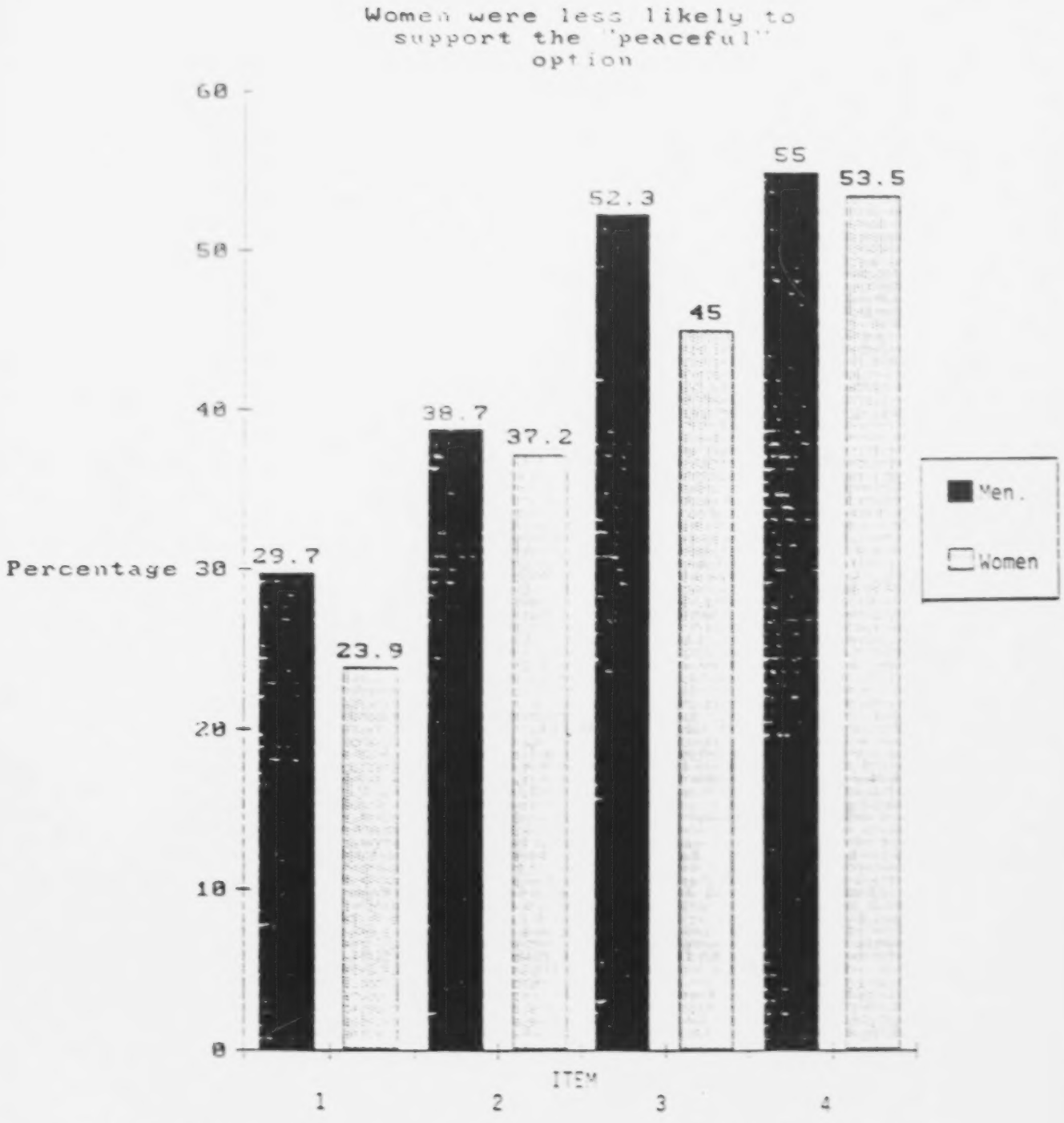
Item 1: Serving in the German army contributes more to maintaining peace than supporting the anti-nukes movement

Item 2: In favor of delivery of weapons to China

Item 3: In favor of support for military regime in El Salvador

Item 4: Against reduction of the arms race by unilateral Western disarmement

TABLE 2



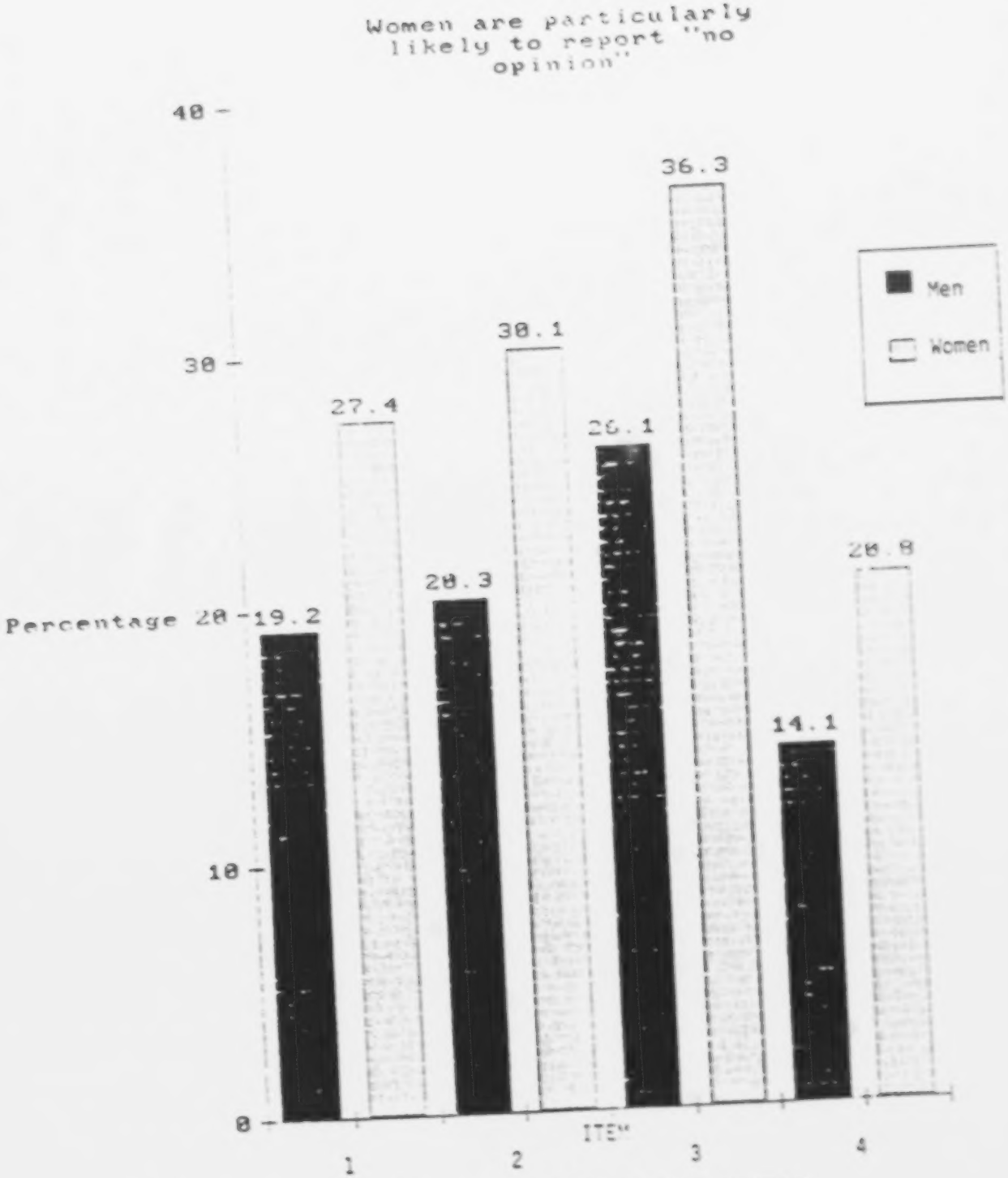
Item 1: Serving in the German army contributes less to maintaining peace than supporting the anti-nukes movement

Item 2: Against delivery of weapons to China

Item 3: Against support for military regime in El Salvador

Item 4: In favor of reduction of the arms race by unilateral Western disarmement

TABLE 3



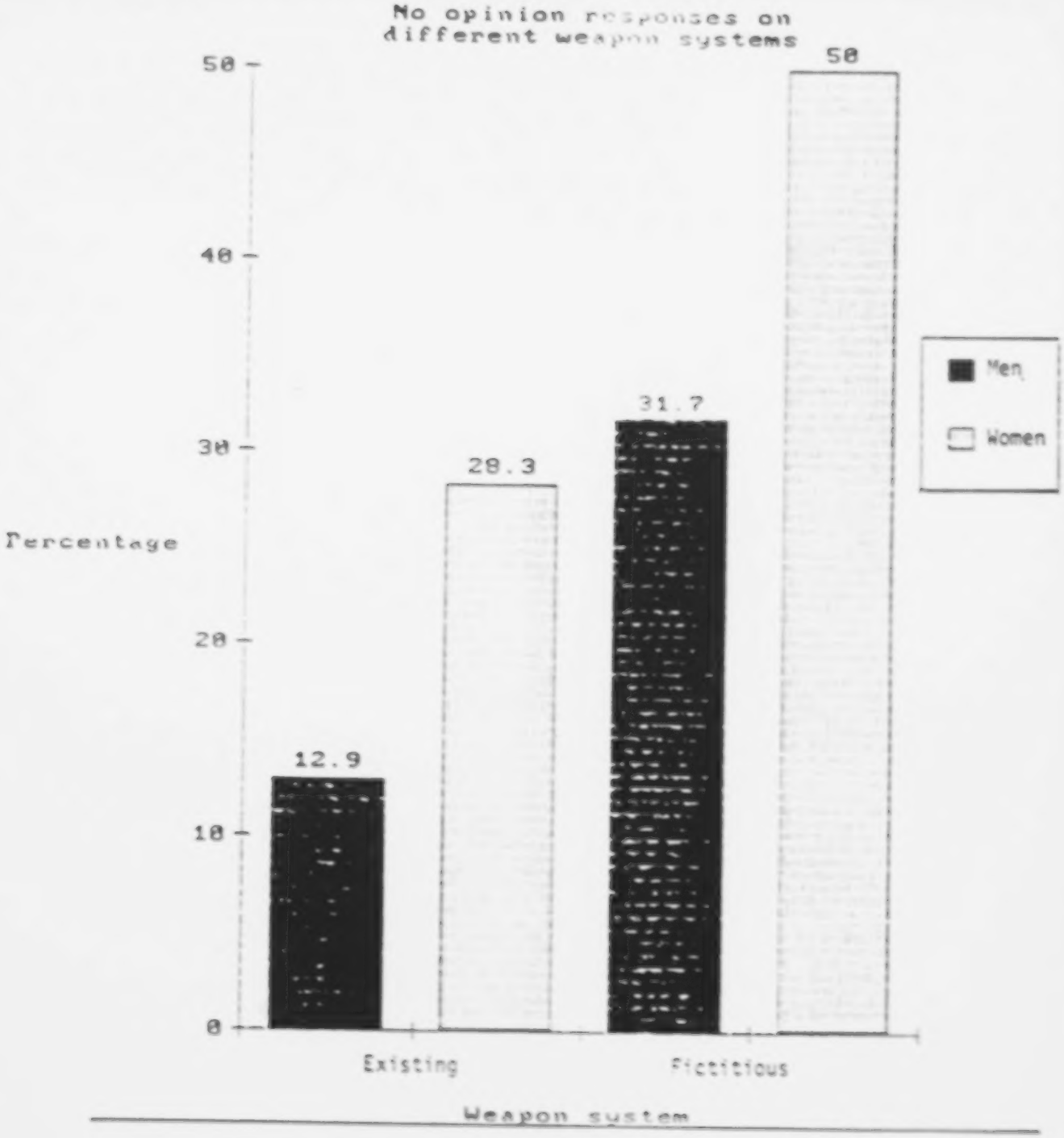
Item 1: Serving in the German army vs. anti-nukes movement

Item 2: Delivery of weapons to China

Item 3: Support for military regime in El Salvador

Item 4: Unilateral Western disarmement

TABLE 4



	Women	Men
Average importance of the development and deployment of new weapons for the defense of the Federal Republic of Germany	2.5 (26)	1.7 (55)

1=very important 7=unimportant